

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A) Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name Minor Sod House  
Other name/site number Minor Post Office, 153-0000-0009

### 2. Location

Street & number SW 1/4, SW 1/4, NW 1/4, SW 1/4, S. 20, T. 5S, R. 36W ☐ not for publication  
City or town McDonald ☒ vicinity  
State Kansas Code KS County Rawlins Code 153 Zip code 67732

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination  
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of  
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  
☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Deborah D. Pankratz, DSHPO November 17, 2004  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
Kansas State Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional  
Comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official /Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- ☐ entered in the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined eligible for the National \_\_\_\_\_  
Register  
☐ See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register  
☐ removed from the National \_\_\_\_\_  
Register  
☐ other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Minor Sod House  
Name of property

Rawlins County, KS  
County and State

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

### Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	2	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	2	total

### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter Categories from instructions)

Domestic: single dwelling

Government: post office

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: hotel

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: sod house

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Earth

walls Concrete

roof Metal: tin

other Brick

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)



Name of Property    Minor Sod House                      County and State    Rawlins County, KS

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Communications

### Period of Significance

1907- 1920

### Significant Dates

1907, 1910

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Sidney H. and Hannah M. Graves

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS): Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ Previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering

Record # \_\_\_\_\_

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Kansas State Historical Society

Name of Property	Minor Sod House
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County and State Rawlins County, KS

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property One acre

## UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

Figure 1 displays four examples of UTM coordinate grids. Each grid is a 2D coordinate system with Easting (horizontal) and Northing (vertical) axes. The grids are labeled 1, 2, 3, and 4. Grid 1 shows specific coordinate values: Zone 1, Easting values 1, 4, 2, 9, 4, 4, 9, 0, and Northing values 4, 3, 8, 6, 0, 4, 0. Grids 2, 3, and 4 show similar grid structures with varying values and highlighted areas.

☐ See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title Fred M. Juenemann

## Organization

Date August 2004

Street & number 525 Main, P. O. Box 206

Telephone 785-694-2575

City or town Brewster

State KS

Zip code 67732

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

## Continuation Sheets

## Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

## Photographs

Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.

### Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

name Buell and Ruth Birney

street & number 3002 County Road 3

telephone

city or town Brewster

state

KS

zip code

67732

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page   1   Name of Property Minor Sod House

### Narrative Description

The Minor Sod House is a one-story abode consisting of two structures. The main structure has a simple-rectangular plan with 24-inch thick walls of stacked native-sod bricks. The end walls extend above the sidewalls to form a peak to support a gabled roof. A small, wood-framed lean-to is attached to the east side on the south end. The exterior of the main structure is cement, and the addition is stucco. The whole roof is covered with galvanized, corrugated tin. A chimney of red brick rises above the center of the roof of the main structure. The sod house is approximately 48' by 19' with its length running north and south. The lean-to addition is 16' by 10'. A cement-walled root cellar is located just southwest of the house.

Double-framed sash windows on all sides of the house are set in their wells toward the edge of the outer walls. Two exterior doors lead to the interior. One is centered on the south gable side. The other is near center of the west eave side.

The interior length of the main structure is divided into three, almost equal sections. The south section is the kitchen/dining room. The middle section is the living room. The north section is divided length-wise into two bedrooms. All the interior sod walls of the main structure are covered with plaster. The ceilings are plastered lathe. The lean-to addition is split into two rooms. The south is a contemporary kitchen, and the north is a bathroom with modern facilities. The ceilings are sheetrock, and the walls are sheetrock and rustic wood. All the floors are cement. The house has been wired for lights and electrical outlets. Two propane stoves supply heating.

The house is located on the bottom land of the South Fork Beaver Creek in southwest Rawlins County, Kansas. Large Chinese Elms to the south shade the house in the summer, and a small cedar windbreak to the north protects it in the winter. There are native pastures to the east and south with farmland to the north and west. A maintained dirt road services the house.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page   2   Name of Property Minor Sod House

The original sod house is a rectangular one-story structure approximately 48' long by 19' wide. It was built in 1907. The length of the building runs north and south. The 8' high eave walls and the 12' high peaked gable walls are constructed entirely of native-sod bricks. The sod bricks are stacked upon themselves with the grass side down to form a wall about 2' thick. The bricks are stacked on the ground with no other foundation material. The sod exterior is protected with a cement covering that was originally applied about 1918. Major repairs were made in 1964, and the walls show evidence of extensive patching over the years. The exterior was painted for the first time in spring of 2001.

The gabled roof of the soddy is constructed of dimensional lumber and consists of a ridge, rafters, and joists. It is solid sheeted and covered with galvanized, corrugated metal. Originally the roof had wood shingles, but they were replaced with metal in 1964. The eaves overhang the sidewalls approximately 12" and have open soffits. The end walls have a 9-inch overhang and the soffits are covered with tin. A 2' tall red brick chimney rises out of the peak of the roof about 15' from the south end.

There are nine double-sash windows set into the sod walls around the house. The sash are not double hung, but are stacked upon each other. They do not open. They are also nailed into the window frames from the outside; therefore, the windows were put in place before the window frames were covered with sod. The window frames do not extend into the full width of the walls. These are 2X6 frames with the window sash nailed in from the outside of the frame. Each window is about 24" wide by 57" tall. All the windows are single, except for a double window in the living room on the west wall. Each window is set into its well near the outside edge of the wall. This leaves deep window wells on the inside of the house. The sills are made of concrete slabs that cover the entire wells. A 3" thick plank was laid above each window opening to support the sod over the window frames. All windows, except one, consist of two panes. The exception has 6 panes above and one below.

There are two door openings leading into the interior. One is centered on the south gable end. The other is near the center of the west eave side. Both openings have new (2001) wood-frame screen doors on the outside of the house. The south door has a window and is an older, paneled door. The west door is a flush, windowless door and was replaced in 2001. Both door openings are framed with 2" lumber and have a heavy plank supporting



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page   3   Name of Property Minor Sod House

the sod above them. The south opening has a 12" frame with the door hung near the outside wall. This makes it very similar to door openings in modern day construction except for the deep wall, interior to the door. The west doorway has a frame extending completely through the wall. The door is hung even with the interior wall. This forms a deep cavity, almost a small hallway, between the screen door and the main door.

The lean-to addition is about 10' wide by 16' long and sits on the south end of the east side of the soddy. It was built sometime soon after the Minors bought the place in 1909. It has 2X4 wood framing with a concrete foundation. The walls are sheeted with inch lumber and covered with stucco. The walls start at about 8' high next to the soddy and slope east to about 5.5' high. It has the same roofing material as the main structure. There are two windows on the east and one on the south. Each is a double-frame sash window with double panes. The windows are not double hung and do not open. There was a single window on the north side, but it was removed while remodeling in 2001. The exterior of the window opening is covered with a sheet of tin.

The south room of the soddy, the kitchen/dining room, is about 14' 5" long by 13.5' wide. All inside measurements are approximate because of the irregularity of the walls. Just inside the door to the east, is a hand pump and sink. A cased well is located directly under the pump. The water table is about 12' down with the well extending 13 feet into the water. The sink drains into a shallow cistern about 30' east of the well. The drain originally ran into a small ditch about 50' east of the house. The old line was partially abandoned and shortened in 2001.

There are two windows in the kitchen/dining room. One is on the south wall, west of the entrance. The other is centered on the west wall. All windows in the original sod structure have about 1.5' deep wells with poured concrete sills. Besides the south entrance, there are three doorways leading from this room. Two, on the east wall, go through the sod wall leading to the modern kitchen and the bathroom. Both of these doorways have paneled doors hung on the outer side of the walls, opening into the addition. The other doorway, leading into the living room, is in the east side of the north wall and has no door.

The walls throughout the sod house are very uneven and covered with a smooth plaster. Originally, the walls were covered with a coarse, rough plaster. The plaster was removed



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page   4   Name of Property Minor Sod House

shortly after the Minors moved into the house in 1909. It was then replaced with a smoother, finer plaster. The ceilings are lathed and plastered. They are very uneven in height, ranging from 7'8" to 7'11" in the kitchen/dining room. The uneven height is due to warping and settling of the ceiling joists.

A red brick chimney is located in the middle of the south wall. This chimney serves to exhaust both the wood cook stove in the kitchen/dining room and the heat stove in the living room.

The floor in the kitchen/dining room is concrete. It was originally wood but was replaced with concrete sometime in the 1940s. The concrete was covered with linoleum at an unknown date. The concrete had some large cracks and showed extensive deterioration, especially in the area near the cook stove. These were repaired in 2001 and the floor was painted. A large oval braided rug now covers much of the floor. The floor rises 3 to 4 inches going into the living room. This is probably because the floors in the living room and the bedrooms were not replaced until 1964. Evidently, less dirt was removed from these rooms before the new concrete floor was poured than was removed when the south room was repaired years earlier.

The house was wired for electricity in 1951. A small fuse panel with round plug fuses and pull-out blocks is located high on the north wall. There are two ceramic light fixtures in the ceiling. Each holds a single light bulb. The light switch and two electrical outlets are mounted on the south wall. This dividing wall is constructed of 2X4 lumber and lathe and plaster. A hook for holding a coal oil lantern still protrudes from the ceiling.

The middle room or living room, is 14'5" wide by 15' long. The walls and ceiling are finished the same as the other rooms in the main sod structure. The ceiling is lower than in the south room, 7'3" to 7'7", because the concrete floor sits higher in this room and the two bedrooms. The concrete floor is much newer and smoother than in the south room. It is also painted and partially covered with an oval braided rug. Before 2001, it was also covered with linoleum.

There is one ceramic light fixture in the middle of the ceiling. Near the fixture is a large hook for hanging a coal oil lantern. The light switch is on the south wall separating the south and middle rooms. One electrical outlet is on the south wall, and one is on the



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page   5   Name of Property Minor Sod House

north wall.

A door leading to the outside is on the south end of the west wall. The only double windows in the house are located on this west wall. Between the door and the windows is a framed opening with a glass front through which the sod structure of the house may be viewed. Another window is located near the center of the east wall.

As mentioned earlier, the wall between the south room and the middle room is 2X4 construction covered with lathe and plaster. A free-standing propane stove stands near this wall and is vented into the chimney behind it. The north wall between the middle room and the two north bedrooms is the same type of construction with a doorway into each bedroom. Both doorways are noticeably crooked and have slat doors opening into the bedrooms.

The north 1/3 of the soddy is divided, north to south, into two equally-sized bedrooms. Each are 13' 4" deep and about 7' wide. A 2X4, lathe and plaster wall divides the two rooms. A light switch and electrical outlet are located on this wall in both rooms. Each has a single light-bulb fixture located near the center of the ceiling. Each has a north window and a window on the east or the west side. The floors are painted concrete partially covered by area rugs. A 1" rod runs from the exterior of the east sod wall to the exterior of the west sod wall. This rod was inserted through the walls long ago to keep the two walls from spreading. It is located about 1' inside the bedrooms a little of 6' above the floor. This rods doubles as a rod for hanging clothes in the bedrooms.

There is very little wood trim in the old house. Each of the interior doorways and the exterior door in the middle room is trimmed with 1X4 flat lumber. The base of the kitchen/dining room sod walls has a six inch wood trim that actually wraps around the curve of the openings through the walls. Some of this baseboard was replaced with joint compound in 2001 to repair rot and termite damage.

The lean-to addition is divided through the middle into two equally sized rooms. Both are 9.5' deep by 7.5' wide. The south room was a bedroom and is now a kitchen. The north room was a pantry and is now a bathroom.. A low slat door on the east end of the dividing wall connected the two rooms. When plumbing was added in 2001, this door was closed off in the south room.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number   7   Page  6  Name of Property Minor Sod House

It can be opened in the north room for access to some of the plumbing. The floor is concrete covered with new linoleum in 2001. The original wood floor was replaced with concrete in the 1940s and has since heaved and cracked. The cracks were filled and some of the lifting fixed in 2001 when water and sewer lines were placed under the floor.

The wall between the two rooms is sheeted with horizontal 1" lumber. The kitchen side, sheeted in 2001, is old siding from a wash house that originally stood just east of the addition. The bathroom side is planed lumber installed when the addition was built. The north wall of the bathroom is also siding from the old wash house. The walls against the sod house are plaster. The other three walls are plaster board. All the electrical wiring in the addition is exposed except for the bathroom vanity lights and outlet. These were installed during the 2001 remodeling.

A small propane heater sits in the bathroom and is vented with galvanized pipe through the ceiling. A water heater is in the kitchen and is also vented through the ceiling. The ceilings are plaster board which is nailed directly to the ceiling rafters. There is no insulation in the 3.5" gap between the ceiling and the tin roof.

An opening into the attic is located in the south room of the sod house. The attic contains no insulation. The exposed wiring is 2-wire cable with no ground wire. The warped ceiling joists are very noticeable from the attic. Also, the sod gables are exposed and visible from the attic.

The site, upon the which the soddy sits, is relatively level. It slopes gradually to the north toward the dry South Fork Beaver Creek which is 1/4 mile away. A small ditch, draining to the north, is located about 50' east of the house. To the south and east of the soddy lies rolling hills of native pasture land. Directly north of the house is leveled irrigation farm land. Farm ground also lies across the road to the west. There a number of large Chinese Elm trees and some Box Elder trees around the house. Several huge stumps and large logs show that large Cottonwood trees used to grow here. A small wind break of Eastern Red Cedar trees is located to the north of the house.

The only other structures near the sod house are a root cellar and a small garage. The root cellar is about 20' south of the house, and the garage is just south of the cellar. The



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(8-86)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 7 Name of Property Minor Sod House

cellar is about 8' by 12.5' with a 6' 8" high ceiling. It had a new cement top poured in the early 1960s. The walls are lined with shelves for the storage of canned goods. The wooden entry to the cellar is gone and the steps are exposed and weathered. The one-car garage is a 10' by 20' wood frame building with wood siding. The age of both structures is uncertain.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8 Name of Property Minor Sod House

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Minor Sod House has two areas of significance with the history and development of Rawlins County, Kansas and of the country in general. The first area is the type of architecture which is a "sod" house (criterion C). The second is in the area of communications and development of an early 20th century rural area with the establishment of a Post Office (criterion A).

The Minor Sod House was constructed probably in the fall of 1907 or spring of 1908 on the SW1/4 of 20-5-36 in Rawlins Co., Ks. This land was originally the timber claim, #2384, of Samuel Dunlap; and a patent was received by his heirs on Sept 7, 1901. According to Isaphene (Dunlap) Leshner, her grandfather Samuel, with his parents Lewis and Letty, wife Icyphene, and two infant daughters arrived in Rawlins County in August of 1887. They traveled by covered wagon from northern Missouri. They lived in a sod house on the site, but not the one that is on the location now. From artifacts found on the site, it is believed the original soddy was located approximately 50 yards due east of the present-day soddy.

Samuel and his father both died in 1892. In 1895, according to the census, the widowed Icyphene continued to live on the land with her mother-in-law, three children, and her new husband John C. Welch, a school teacher. In 1900, Icyphene Welch sold the land and moved to Sherman County. She sold the property to C. P. Dewey before she had proved up and received the patent on the land. C. P. Dewey was a Chicago banker, owner of the Oak Ranch, and the father of Chauncey Dewey of the "Dewey-Berry Feud" fame. From 1903 to 1906, there were several ownership transfers recorded by Dewey, his wife (later his widow), and several business associates of Dewey.

In October of 1906, John Forrest bought the quarter-section of land. It was in December of 1906 that the Timber Claim patent was finally recorded in Rawlins County. Forrest sold the land to Sidney Graves on March 1, 1907. Sidney Graves sold the property with a "one-year-old house" to Tom Minor on January, 1909.

According to the Emigrant's Guide to Homes in Kansas written by the Kansas Emigration Bureau, there were four ways to obtain land. (1) Homestead, (2) Timber



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9 Name of Property Minor Sod House

Entry, (3) Pre-emption Filing, (4) School Land. The Dunlaps received a patent from a Timber Culture Certificate. This was to be done in the following manner: "In the timber-culture case, he can secure his title by coming within the Land District, and appearing before a Notary Public or Clerk of Court, and having the legal papers executed, or he can remain at home, and through a land agent purchase a timber claim from some one who has or will enter it. Then, *within one year*, he must break five acres (or hire it done) and cultivate them. The second year he must break five acres more, ten acres in all, and cultivate them, plant in timber the five acres broken the first year. The third year he must plant in timber the five acres broken the second year, ten acres in all. The timber must be forest trees-not fruit trees-and must be planted four feet apart each way, or 2750 trees to the acre. These trees must be cultivated successfully until the expiration of eight years from his first entry of the land, when he can prove and get his patent from the Government." There is no physical evidence of the 10 acres of timber on the land today.

Not much is known about Sidney H. and Hannah M. Graves. They did not occupy the property long enough to be listed on the local census. They built the present-day sod house in 1907 or early 1908. It had to have been built within that time frame for it to be considered "one-year-old" in January of 1909.

Sod house were built with walls made of strips of sod laid horizontally in courses like bricks. Sod houses were common in the frontier days on the western plains of the United States, where wood and stone were scarce. The sod, turned by the plow and held together by roots, was lifted in strips and usually cut in 3-ft (1-m) lengths (sods). The walls were hewed smooth with a spade and were often plastered with clay and ashes. Sometimes roofs were of frame construction; usually they were thatched or covered with sods, which had to be replaced after heavy rains. Sod walls were fire and windproof and good insulators, but they permitted only small window openings. (Dick, The Sod House Frontier, 1937)

According to Roger Welsch, in his book Sod Walls, the best time to build a sod house was in the fall of the year when the grass became woody and acquired tough, wire-like roots. However, many homesteaders did not have the luxury of waiting for the best season. No record has been found to indicate that the original sod house was still standing or inhabitable when the Graves acquired the land. Chances are that, after 20 years of being exposed to the elements, cattle, varmints and probably sitting empty for



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10 Name of Property Minor Sod House

number of years, the house was either uninhabitable or completely destroyed.

Whether they designed and constructed the house or had it built is also unknown. Its construction was similar to most sod houses in the area with some notable exceptions. The house was larger than many soddies, measuring 48 feet long and having 4 large rooms. It also sported a wood shingle roof instead of sod and had a nice wooden floor instead of dirt. The deep window sills were constructed of concrete instead of sod. It also had a water well with a hand pump located in the kitchen. This would have been considered a luxury. At the time this house was constructed, many older sod houses in the area were being abandoned; and people were moving into more newly constructed frame houses.

The probable reason for the Graves choosing to construct a home of sod was simple economy. Many of the early homes on the Kansas prairies were constructed of sod because of the lack of wood, rocks, or stone outcroppings in the area. Hauling in lumber from the east was too expensive for a farmer who could hardly afford to pay his filing fees and buy basic farming equipment. Sod was plentiful and provided excellent insulation against the harsh Kansas weather. Tornadoes might tear off a sod house roof, its weakness, but the walls remained standing. A sod house was also a good refuge from prairie fires and a good fortress during Indian warfare. As time passed, it was easier to obtain lumber, shingles, hardware, cement and other building material. Thus, wood-frame houses began replacing the sod houses. And, when a sod house was later constructed such as this one, it showed refinements over the earlier constructions.

In January of 1909, Tom and Mary Minor bought the land with the sod house. In March of that same year with the six youngest of their 12 children, they moved from a farm in Fullerton, Nebraska to Rawlins County. Tom had farmed and owned a butcher shop and grocery store at Fullerton. He was fifty three years old and wanted to raise cattle, horses, and alfalfa. Since land was cheaper in Rawlins County, Kansas than it was in Nance County, Nebraska, he decided to move to Kansas.

Eight horses, six cows, furniture, and the family dog were loaded into box cars at Fullerton. Two of the older boys accompanied Tom on the two day train journey to McDonald, Kansas. From McDonald, the livestock were herded the remaining 14 miles to the new farm, and the furniture was hauled in wagons. The rest of the family followed soon after.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11 Name of Property Minor Sod House

The sod house, although refined over older sod constructions, was not Mary's picture of a dream home. There were no trees around the house. It had only 4 rooms, and the inside walls were "rough plastered". When Mary saw the sod house, she wanted to return to Nebraska where she had a nice two-story frame house. She had also left half her children and friends of 11 years. But the family went to work and made the house into a comfortable home. The coarse plaster was removed and replaced with smooth plaster. A wood frame addition was attached to the east side to accommodate a kitchen pantry and another bedroom. For heat, they added a "Round Oak" stove in the parlor; and they had a large "Home Comfort" stove to use for cooking, baking, and heating in the kitchen. They lived comfortably in the sod house until Tom's death in 1944. Mary continued to live in the soddy until she moved to Goodland, Kansas in 1949.

During the 35 years that Tom lived at the sod house, he was a postmaster, grocery store operator, and the Rotate Township trustee for thirty-two years. Besides farming and raising cattle and hogs, he was a horse and mule breeder. Mary stayed busy cooking, washing, cleaning, sewing, baking bread, and caring for the children. She raised large gardens and canned beef, pork, vegetables, and fruit. She also raised chickens and turkeys, gathered eggs, milked cows, and churned butter. She attended quilting bees and was an active member of her church. In short, they were typical of the breed of people who settled the rural areas of America.

Tom and Mary's youngest daughter and son-in-law, Dorothy and Jess Yankey, lived in the soddy from 1949 until the early 1950s when they moved into a frame house just south of the soddy. In 1955, the land and soddy were sold to Buell and Ruth Briney. Buell is a grandson of Tom and Mary Minor. From 1955 until December of 2001, the house has been occasionally used by visiting family, clubs, churches, students, scouts, and hunters. In December of 2001, after extensive repairs and remodeling, it was opened to the public as the Minor Family Sod House Bed and Breakfast by Fred and Lesa Juenemann. Lesa is a great-granddaughter of Tom and Mary Minor.

It is impossible to determine how many sod houses were constructed in Rawlins County. Pursuant to Acts of Congress from 1864 to 1878, as explained by the Kansas Emigration Bureau, a person could claim land in four ways. Three of the four ways included the requirement of living on the property for an extended time. Only the Timber Claim did



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 12 Name of Property Minor Sod House

not require living on the quarter-section of land, but the pioneers may have done so as in this case of the Dunlaps. There are 1080 sections of land in Rawlins County. That means there are 4320 quarters that could have been claimed, less the land owned and sold by the railroad. Many of the railroad properties would likely have had home sites on them too. If even half of the available land were occupied by settlers and the other half timber claimed or purchased, it is quite conceivable and a conservative estimate that there were well over 2000 houses constructed. Of these, the vast majority would have been dugouts, sod houses, or combinations of the two. To this today, on virgin grasslands in Rawlins and surrounding counties, one can locate numerous dugout and sod house sites.

Roger Welsh sums up the sod houses' significance rather nicely in his book, Sod Walls.

"If nothing else, the soddy can remind us of the hardships that were endured by the people who built it and lived in it. Perhaps it can remind us of our debt to those who came before us, of our heritage. This remembrance is not so much to increase our pride as our humility, for it is by no effort or talent of our own that we have become heirs of their accomplishments. We are the product of all those who came before, who lived in the soddies-even if our parents came from Germany long after the Sod-House Frontier, as Everett Dick so aptly calls it, had passed.

The sod house deserves respect. Only a few will be saved. Despite their basic sturdiness-especially those with good roofs-they are doomed. Some will simply dissolve bit by bit in the Nebraska rains. Others will be pulled down and plowed away-because they provide an all too convenient convention hall for skunks and weasels, because they are unattractive, because....

In fact, it will only be by extraordinary effort that any will be saved, because it is far easier to build a new sod house than it is to save an authentic old one. But the results are also far less satisfying. A new sod house is a mere imitation, no matter how much money, care, and research is spent on the reconstruction. A builder can take two-hundred-year-old wood, use an old plane and hammer, have nails wrought in a forge, and build a table according to an eighteenth-century plan, but the result is not an antique; it is only a replica. And the same is true of the reconstruction of a sod house."

The second area of significance deals with the establishment of a United States Post



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 13 Name of Property Minor Sod House

Office in the house. Between the dates of 3/07/1910 and 11/15/1920, a post office was located on the property. It was named Minor, Kansas; and Tom Minor is listed as the first Postmaster. The post office was originally established in the sod house until Tom Minor built a small grocery store about 1/4 mile south of the house. He then operated the store and post office together until Showalters, cousins of the Minors, took over the store. Eventually the store closed, and the post office was moved once again into the soddy. It remained there until it closed on 11/15/1920. A 1914 census map of the area shows Minor and many other small post office sites that no longer exist today. With the proliferation of automobiles and the increased mobility of the populace, the post offices were centralized in the established towns.

While horse power was still the main mode of transportation, having a post office in a developing rural area brought the outside world into the isolated rural communities. The post office was close enough so farm families could receive mail on a regular basis. If they were to rely on collecting their mail at the nearest town, it might be mean receiving mail on a monthly basis only.

The local post office also became a gathering place for rural communities. Along with the rural churches and schools, it was a focal point for socializing and sharing local news. The memory of one such gathering has been passed down over the years. Several grandchildren of local pioneers recall a story told by their parents. In 1917, a small circus stopped overnight at Minor and put on a performance. It was on its way from Brewster to McDonald, a distance of about 30 miles. Minor was about half way or 16 miles from Brewster. In those days, the elephants had to walk from town to town. It was quite a show; and people came from all around to see the elephants, ponies, and other acts. They performed south of the soddy in a draw so the people could use the small bluffs as bleachers. On other occasions, rodeos were also held there.

After the post office closed in 1920, the Minor sod house became just another typical home on the western Kansas prairie. At least 3 grandchildren were born in the house. Neighbors and relatives still came visiting, but it was no longer a focal point of the community. There were still the rural schools and country churches; but these too were fading into history by the early 1950's. With the ease of traveling by automobile, towns like Brewster and McDonald became the places to gather for worship, shopping, and educating the children. These towns are now struggling to survive as the farms become larger and the rural areas become less populated. Today many of the county seats are also besieged with declining population and lost job opportunities. The time of the old sod house, neighborhood gatherings, and a rural America is becoming a fast fading memory.



United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 14 Name of Property Minor Sod House

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United States Department of the Interior  
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# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 15 Name of Property Minor Sod House

### **VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

A 209' by 209' parcel of land located in the SW1/4, SW1/4, NW1/4, SW1/4 of Section 20, Township 5S, Range 36W.

### **BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The one-acre site encompasses the sod house and the surrounding yard.



KANSAS

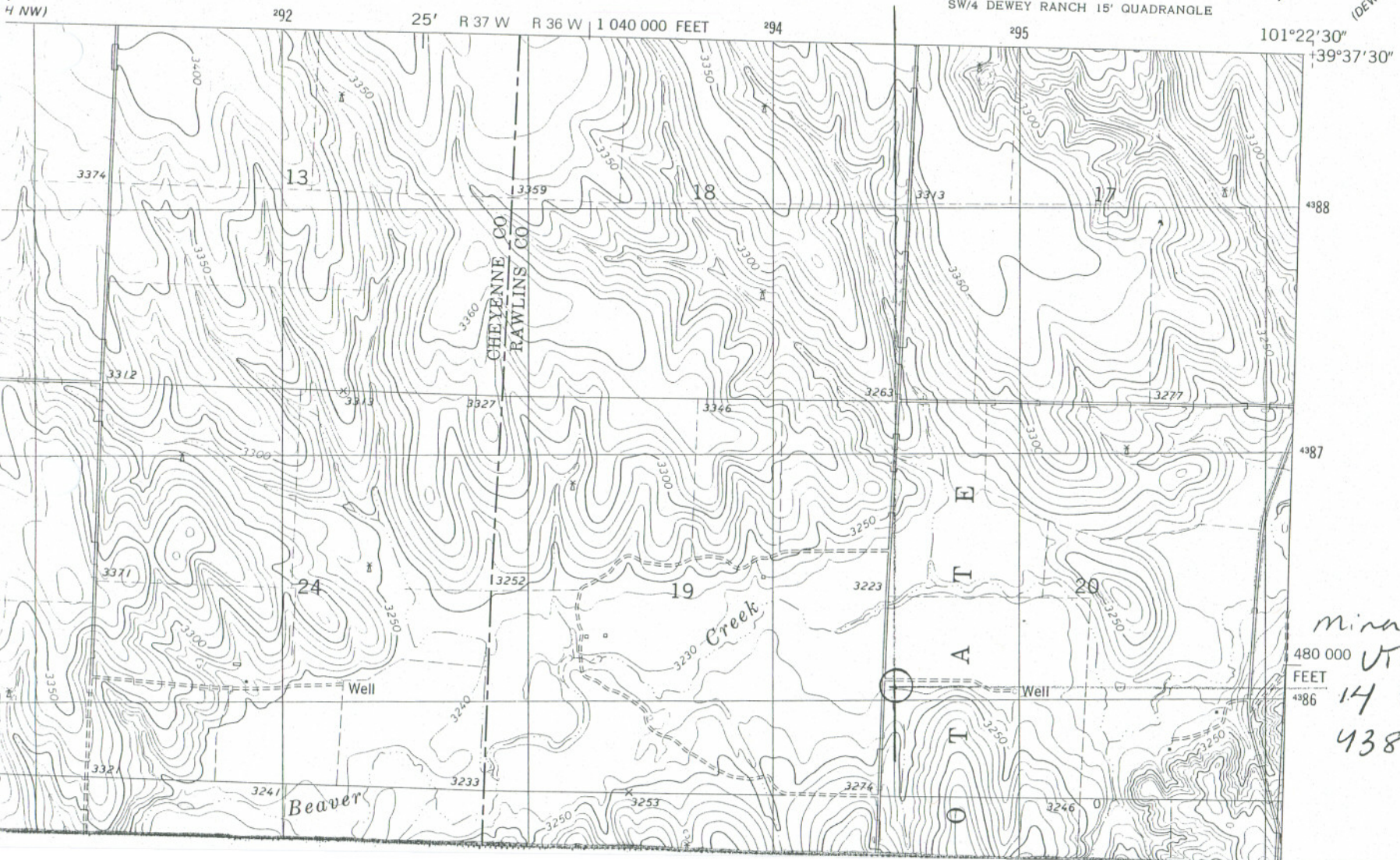
DEWEY RANCH SW QUADRANGLE  
KANSAS

7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

SW/4 DEWEY RANCH 15' QUADRANGLE

5763 III NE  
(DEWEY RANCH)

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101°22'30"  
39°37'30"

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